

RESEARCH REPORT

DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT AS IDENTITY REGULATION  
IN THE POST-FORDIST PRODUCTIVE SPACE

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# **DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT AS IDENTITY REGULATION IN THE POST-FORDIST PRODUCTIVE SPACE**

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In the last twenty years, diversity has made its way into the world of management as well as into the academia. While numbers of consultants are riding the diversity hype, teaching managers what diversity is and how to make it yield, scholars attempt to measure the effects of workforce diversity onto organizations' internal processes and outputs. The emergence of diversity as an autonomous organizational research area has generally been explained in two ways. Most authors (Cox & Blake, 1991; Cross et al., 1994; Morrison, 1992; Thomas, 1991) see it as the effect of a historical shift in the composition of the (North-American) labour force. From this perspective, diversity management represents an organizational strategy to adapt to changing Western labour markets characterized by feminization, ageing, migration, differential birth rates between the local and the migrant populations, etc. A smaller group of scholars (McDougall, 1996; Kandola & Fullerton, 1994; Kelly & Dobbin, 1998) has rather interpreted diversity management as a managerial re-appropriation of equal opportunity (EO) legislation. They argue that, in the discursive shift from EO to diversity management, managers have re-cast EO as a managerial tool and appropriated it to increase performance and profit via the optimal use of human resources (McDougall, 1996; Kandola and Fullerton, 1994; Kelly and Dobbin, 1998).

While both genealogies of diversity appear plausible, their empirical testing does present some difficulties. On the first account, while statistics point to an accelerated diversification of the labour force, mass migrations to and among Western countries are nothing new to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. What is then specific to the last twenty years? Answers to this question commonly refer, with varying degrees of success, to critical thresholds in the composition of the labour force, the pace of its diversification, or, alternatively, the degree of (cultural) difference between an original working population and new groups of workers (cf. Borjas, 1999). On the

second account, while there is an unquestionable link between EO legislation (in the US and in the UK) and the emergence of diversity management, diversity has become an accepted managerial issue even in countries lacking a strong EO legislative tradition, as in continental Europe.

The two current genealogies of diversity are therefore historically and geographically too narrow. In this chapter, we would like to reconstruct a third, alternative genealogy, one which looks for the conditions of possibility for the emergence of diversity management in a shifting productive space rather than in a demographic or legal one. We hold that diversity management is best seen as a major mode of control within the post-Fordist productive space, one that operates through the regulation of identity (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). It does so by providing constructions of the working subject which are in line with organizational interests and from which workers can draw to self-define themselves.

To develop this alternative genealogy, we first define productive space as a configuration of practices and illustrate the practices that configure the post-Fordist productive space at the macro, meso and micro level; respectively, the international economy, the organization, and labour. Consequently, we show how post-Fordism represents a discursive and material productive space for diversity management to regulate workers' identity as individuals, members of a socio-demographic group, and members of the organization. In order to do so, diversity management draws from identities promoted by two other major control modes through identity regulation: human resource management (HRM) and organizational culture. Before concluding the chapter with a reflection on post-Fordism as a condition of possibility of diversity management, we illustrate how in the post-Fordist space, (diverse) workers

appropriate identities, both as individuals and as groups, in order to resist and even partially emancipate themselves.

### **Changing Spaces: From Fordism to Post-Fordism**

In the last thirty years, new organizational practices have gradually developed out of the increasing competition and international deregulation of markets. While scholars stress different, sometimes contradictory, aspects of this evolution, there is a wide consensus that it represents a historical moment for capitalism, one which has radically reconfigured organizations and work (Whitaker, 1992). The various terms that have been coined –neo-Fordism (Aglietta, 1982; Palloix, 1976), post-Fordism (Piore & Sabel, 1984), Toyotism (Castells, 1996), flexible accumulation (Harvey, 1989; Scott, 1988), disorganized capitalism (Lash & Urry, 1987), the flexible firm (Bagguley, 1991), and even postmodern organization (Clegg, 1990)– all stress the deep rupture between Fordism and post-Fordism, portraying them as diametrically opposed.

Following this line of reasoning, we hold that Fordism and post-Fordism can indeed be seen as two distinct types of productive spaces, characterized by specific discursive/material practices and relative modes of control. Such distinction should however be seen as analytical, and thus, to some extent, artificial (Sayer, 1989), as contemporary Western organizations, in practice, selectively draw and combine features from both ideal types of productive space.

Productive spaces are distinct configurations of discursive and non-discursive organizational practices. Such practices are spatial in the sense that they give both a material and a symbolic form to the organization, they set boundaries. The material and the symbolic stand to each other in a dialectical relationship: on the one hand, the

materiality of organization –the material space formed by organizational material practices– sustains its symbolic production, while, on the other, organizational discourses –the symbolic space formed by organizational discursive practices– direct the shaping of material space. A productive space, a configuration of material and discursive practices, does not only shape the productive space *within* a given organization, but rather forms the organization as a whole by also defining organizational boundaries to the *outside*.

For instance, in post-Fordism, just-in-time is a managerial discourse that re-orders the material productive space as to facilitate the co-ordinated flow of products or services into, through and outside the organization. Such discourse directs technological choices, shapes the physical layout of the production process and, consequently, deeply affects material work practices as well as managerial control strategies. At the same time, these material practices provide the perceptual and experiential support that makes that very discourse of just-in-time possible and graspable, and either maintains or that challenges it. Moreover, just-in-time systems, by making organizations and their members working closer to and more dependent on each other, call into question existing boundaries both within organizations and between them.

In the following sections, we review the features of post-Fordism starting from the transition that has occurred at the macro level towards an increasingly globalized economy, through the change in the organization processes, to the implications onto work and the forms of control of the labour force. We argue that post-Fordism has reconfigured practices at these three levels creating three corresponding spaces of the economy, the organization and work. As suggested by Garrahan and Stewart (1992), it is only through the analysis of the interdependencies among these levels that we can

develop an understanding of the spatio-temporal discontinuities that characterise post-Fordism.

### **Shifting practices at the macro level: The new economic space**

Friedman (2000) comparatively summarizes the features of Fordism and post-Fordism as follows: Fordism is characterized by large, vertically integrated oligopolic firms using and continuously improving mass production technology and Tayloristic practices of work organizations; productivity rises derive from economies of scale and strict control over low-skilled line-bound workers; the credit system finances investments in the short run, and profits are supported by consumer demand made possible by high and rising wages; such wages are negotiated by large trade unions to compensate harsh conditions of labour and continuous re-organizations; and the state supports unions ready to compromise in order to pursue Keynesian full-employment policies and finance the welfare system. In the Fordist model, the economic and the national political systems are thus complementary.

The oil crisis of the early 1970s reveals the fragility of the system. The Fordist structure of accumulation and regulation begins to show acute internal and external difficulties due to the 'fracturing of the foundations of predictability upon which Fordism was based' (Murray, 1988: 9; Albertsen, 1988). Among the difficulties are the tensions arising from the technical and social rigidities of mass production, growing problems of labour militancy and worker morale, and the rising costs of production slowing down productivity growth and eroding competitiveness (Whitaker, 1992).

Under increased international competition and deregulation of commodity and financial markets, a new economic order, characterized by a new international division of labour, starts to emerge (Thrift 1986; Harvey 1989). Industrial production

is decentralized towards the 'under-capitalized world' (Cook 1988) and the periphery of industrialized countries, while these latter move towards the service sector, causing the growth of the service (middle) class (Urry, 1988). Concentrated ownership and technical innovation based on micro-electronics and information technologies make it possible to co-ordinate 'spatially discontinuous patterns of production' (Garrahan & Stewart, 1992). At the macro level, post-Fordism presents the following key features: small batch production of differentiated products with unpredictable life cycles due to the fashion element, globalized markets, rising productivity thanks to economies of scope (rather than of scale), flexible production systems and smaller stocks (Friedman, 2000). Large firms are broken down into smaller business units, flattened and linked in quasi-market networks of suppliers, distributors and even competitors. The fundamental compromise between a few big national companies, trade unions and the state breaks down.

Contesting Lash and Urry's (1988) label of post-Fordism as 'disorganised capitalism,' some authors (Thrift, 1986; Cooke, 1988) have argued that the new economic order is as organized as Fordism, yet different. Post-Fordism is an economic space which is at the same time more fragmented, due to decentralising practices, and more integrated, due to the internationalising practices strengthening interdependencies. Using Harvey's words (1989: 159; stress in original), 'capitalism is becoming ever more tightly organized *through* dispersal, geographical mobility, and flexible responses in labour markets, labour processes and consumer markets, all accompanied by hefty doses of institutional, product and technological innovation.' The post-Fordist economic space is thus a space characterized by spatio-temporal discontinuities and multiple and shifting boundaries.



### **Shifting practices at the meso level: The new organizational space**

In this new economic space, the limits of Tayloristic, bureaucratic organizations soon become apparent. Strict division of labour, coordination through hierarchy, centralization, collective contractual agreements for each layer of the hierarchy, job allocation on the basis of formalized competence such as education, motivation on the basis of incentives, and promotion on the basis of seniority or achievement (Clegg, 1990), the cornerstones of traditional management theory, become inadequate to compete in this unstable, fragmented and yet highly integrated economic space. That same strict division of conception and execution of work as well as that strict control of the precise manner in which work is to be performed (Braverman, 1974), which allowed organizations to be very profitable in the past, become insuperable rigidities.

In order to survive, organizations are forced to down-size, introduce 'lean' production systems (Friedman, 2000) based on small batch processing, apply stricter, diffuser quality control procedures, outsource non-core processes and services, and re-organize in networks of companies linked through logistic systems based on the principles of just-in-time and no-stock enabled by information technologies. At the same time, in order to better meet demands, they direct their product to specialized markets or market niches, connect R&D with production departments, and invest in customer relations.

It has been argued that, on the whole, these changes reflect a process of de-differentiation (Lash, 1988; Clegg, 1990), of blurring of organizational boundaries. However, the internal re-organization of processes is rather characterized by both re-differentiation and de-differentiation. On one side, business units are created, which fragment the organization. On the other, intra-departmental project structures, matrix structures, project and teamwork and overlapping roles are introduced to coordinate

what has been fragmented. Towards the outside, de-differentiation is indeed prevailing and mainly occurs through outsourcing on the supplier side and integration of customers in the design and production processes. The result is a productive space which, again, is characterized by blurred boundaries due to simultaneous fragmentation and interdependence within and between organizations.

### **Shifting practices at the micro level: The new space of work**

The flexibilization of production processes has entailed a fundamental re-organization of work towards a more flexible use of labour. This flexibility is the product of a process of de-differentiation of work across the organizational boundaries. De-differentiation has occurred through de-rigidification and re-drawing of skill boundaries (Martin, 1988) as well as job boundaries (Tomaney, 1990; Whitaker, 1992). Life-long learning, multi-skilling, re-skilling, task enlargement and job rotation are practices shifting skill boundaries, while the widespread use of new work practices like teamwork, overlapping work roles, quality circles and kaizen renders job boundaries more permeable. Through these practices, workers master the complexities of different tasks and grasp the interconnectedness among them. Skill formation is consequently achieved more intra-organizationally than individually and thus located in the context of the overall skilling of work groups rather than just the human capital of a competitive individual (Clegg, 1990).

Such new systems of labour organization reconstitute the terms of employee subordination (Garrahan & Steward, 1992) away from traditional supervision by superiors towards more diversified and generally less direct modes of control of labour. Control is exerted through a combination of setting individual and group goals, and letting 'empowered' employees manage themselves and their peers to reach those goals (Gough 1992). Moreover, customers increasingly play an important role

in controlling work through the evaluation of products and, in the case of services, through the very monitoring of the service delivery.

However, some authors have also stressed a related, parallel movement towards increasing differentiation of the workforce between 'core' and 'periphery' (Gough, 1990; Friedman, 2000). They argue that, following the Japanese model, lean organizations are made possible by splitting the workforce into a core of long-term workers, in whose skills the organization invests permanently and whose work is managed mainly through indirect control practices, and a periphery of temporary and/or part-time workers, who are less skilled, receive limited training, and who are closely supervised through direct modes of control enhanced by technological innovation (Leman 1992: 124). Organizations increasingly differentiate personnel's contractual forms –specifically, the length of contract and the forms of remuneration– as well as the amount and type of training they receive (Gough, 1992: 36).

It remains however difficult to apply the clear-cut distinction core-periphery to concrete cases, because not all highly (multi)-skilled employees are empowered and have secure employment contracts, nor all unskilled ones are closely monitored and have insecure ones (Gough 1992; Penn, 1992; Rainnie & Kraithman, 1992: 65), and, we would add, because the core/periphery position of a worker depends not only on his/her position relative to the internal labour market but also the external one –his/her general 'employability.' Nonetheless, it is clear that these two tendencies of de-differentiation and (re-)differentiation coexist and that new work practices do tend to break down the unitary management of labour and, by so doing, to reconfigure the contemporary space of work.

Again, as noted for the organizational space, the resulting space of work is one characterized by blurring boundaries within the organization, with increased

fragmentation of and interdependence among the workforce. At the same time, the very boundaries of work are challenged through workers' interdependence with extra-organizational actors such as suppliers and customers. Due to the spatio-temporal discontinuity of production and work, workers are subjected to a multiplicity of control mechanisms, ranging from self-management, to control through coordination (by peers, customers, and suppliers), and close surveillance by means of computer technologies.

## **Conclusion**

The post-Fordist productive space emerges from discursive and material practices at the three interlocking levels of the economy, the organization, and work. Post-Fordist organizations derive their flexibility from articulating the spatio-temporal discontinuities within and between these three levels. They dislocate, outsource, merge, re-structure, re-engineer and down-size, and by so doing, continuously fragment and reconstitute capital and labour (relations) in time and space. The dynamic is therefore double: de-differentiation and blurring of existing, familiar boundaries and permanent re-differentiation and articulation of new ones.

## **Control in the Post-Fordist Space: Diversity Management as a Mode of Identity Regulation**

It is in the late 1980s, in the middle of the West's transition towards the post-Fordist economic, productive and work space, that diversity management emerges as a hot topic in the business world and, a few years later, in the academia. This timing is all but fortuitous. Diversity management can in fact be seen as a phenomenon characteristic of the post-Fordist productive space as it is a mode of control responding to the new managerial need to control labour indirectly through the

regulation of identity. While the organizational literature has analysed HRM (Townley 1993; Williams 1994) and organizational culture (Willmott, 1993) as modes of control operating through the very constitution of the working subject, diversity management has not yet been analyzed in this perspective.

In the highly integrated, unstable and fluid post-Fordist space, control no longer derives from a single, fixed hierarchical structure of authority, but rather becomes more diffuse, fluid and heterogeneous. Such multiplication profoundly affects the (power) relation between capital and labour. It has been argued that post-Fordist practices and the relative de-centring of power makes it is more difficult for workers to identify with one (labour) class and to deploy class as an organizing principle for collective action. At the same time, the new work practices require workers' commitment, and by so doing raise enormous expectations. That is, workers expect not simply work to be meaningful *in se* but also to provide meaning as to who they are (Rose, 1990). Consequently, the reconfiguration of work practices aims at satisfying this demand for (self-)meaning while, at the same time, regulating it so that the subject's creative power can be released –rather than suppressed– and made profitable.

In organization studies, the relationship between subjectivity/identity and power/control has generally been analyzed by drawing from Foucault's work (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Knight & Willmott, 1989; Styhre, 2001; Townley, 1993). While the idea that power is often exerted through ideological means is not new (Bourdieu, 1977; Gramsci, 2001; Hall, 1988), Foucault's conceptualization of power distinguishes itself because it sees power as constituting *all* social relations, rather than the monopoly of privileged elites and institutions. Such approach is particularly useful because allows analysing how (organizational) subjectivity, the

sense of the self, is produced by involvement in everyday, micro power relations as well as how it contributes to sustaining those very power relations by whose virtue it exists. Following this perspective, we discuss how diversity management operates in the post-Fordist space as a set of managerial practices regulating workers' identities in such a way that they develop a sense of the self conducive to the attainment of organizational goals. We distinguish three ways in which diversity management regulates workers' identity: by defining them (i) as strongly individualized, entrepreneurial subjects, (ii) as members of specific socio-demographic groups, and (iii) as members of the organization.

### **Diversity management: Regulating individual identity**

Diversity management contributes in the first place to the constitution of the autonomous, individualized working subject upon whom the post-Fordist space depends for its flexible functioning. While HRM provides the framework for the emergence of such worker's subjectivity, diversity management particularly stresses the value of each individual's unique potential as a possible contribution to the organization. This focus represents a clear rupture with previous conceptualizations of labour.

In the Fordist space, workers are primarily identified by their positions with respect to the machine system. The line divides labour and fixes individual workers to specific jobs (Braverman, 1974) making them fully adjuncts to the machine (Clegg, 1990), integrally part of the 'complex automaton' (Ure, 1835 in Biggs, 1996). It is through such fitting between jobs which require different degrees of skill or force and individuals that major savings on labour costs are achieved (Babbage, 1963). Workers' value lies in their capacity to live up to a pre-fixed, standardized potential

determined by the work processes as designed by the engineering department. Their identity as workers is 'given' as it depends on their position in the productive process as labour (in opposition to capital) as well as on the type of job they perform.

In the post-Fordist space, the association between identity and position within the labour process is disrupted by the blurring of job boundaries, job rotation, task enlargement and, in general, more open-ended tasks. Workers have to tap autonomously into their productive potential, which is no longer pre-determined, but rather constructed as a horizon of possibility. Control is increasingly achieved indirectly, through organizational practices that set the goals in the abstract, impersonal terms of quantity, quality and time, presupposing and promoting an empowered, responsible, flexible, cooperative and self-disciplined subject who autonomously discovers his/her own potential and manages its exploitation. This is the new working subject that has been constituted by HRM since the 1980s (Townley, 1998; Steyaert & Janssens, 1999). S/he is 'achievement-oriented' (Keenoy & Anthony, 1992), and considers work as a means to 'individual self-fulfilment and self-creation' (Noon, 1992; Rose, 1990). The worker becomes an entrepreneur and his/her career a project of the self, which he/she has to manage in collaboration with other organizational actors through HRM tools such as competence management, 360-degree feedback, performance appraisals, life-long learning, high potential programmes, and assessment centres.

Diversity management contributes to the shaping of this new worker's subjectivity by particularly stressing the organizational value of the individual as unique. In this perspective, individual differences do not constitute an organizational problem, but rather a source of additional (creative, problem-solving) human resource potential, waiting to be fully tapped by diversity management (Thomas, 1991).

While diversity management relies on the working subject of HRM, the two sets of management practices also present a major point of tension. By its very existence as an autonomous set of practices, diversity management calls attention to the deficiencies of the meritocratic system of HRM and, particularly, to the existence of (hidden, structural) barriers to the optimal use of certain individuals' potential. In the ideal, diverse meritocratic organization, all individuals, independent of their demographic and professional profile, are empowered, entrepreneurial subjects with equal chances to succeed in the organization. In practice, however, diversity management is often needed to adjust HRM practices to ensure bias free selection and appraisal, adapted work arrangements –such as flexible hours, telework, and flexible vacation schemes to diverse individuals' personal needs–, and mentoring and informal networks providing diverse workers with extra support (Cox & Blake, 1991). Diverse workers are expected to make use of these facilities to better combine their professional identity with their non-professional life, manage themselves, deploy their potential, and ultimately be more productive at work (Liff & Wajcman, 1996; Zanoni & Janssens, 2004). Consequently, their identity is doubly regulated. They have the responsibility to grab opportunities not only as entrepreneurial, self-managing workers like every member of the organization, but also on the specific ground of their being different.

To conclude, in the post-Fordist space, characterized by blurring boundaries, diversity management controls workers through identity regulation at the individual level. In order to do so, it does not only make use of the boundaries established by HRM around the working individual to construct him/her as an autonomous, empowered, and self-managing entrepreneur, but it also makes diverse workers



responsible to manage their own diversity in a way that is productive both for themselves and the organization.

### **Diversity management: Regulating group identity**

Diversity management does not only regulate workers' identities as individuals, but also as members of specific socio-demographic groups. Of the three modes of control, this type of identity regulation is the most distinctive of diversity management. It is thanks to diversity management that socio-demographic groups have in fact, for the first time, become legitimate organizational actors.

As illustrated in the previous section, in Fordist space, workers are classified by the division of labour. What is yet to be said is that the division of labour not only determines the allocation of different *individuals* to single phases of the work process, but also that this allocation de facto groups these individuals in different *categories*. While, theoretically, the categories are based on individual (body) skills, in practice, they match specific demographic profiles. The correspondence between the classification based on the division of labour and the one based on socio-demographic characteristics is clear in Babbage's (1963) famous example of the pin production. Next to each task to be performed (i.e. drawing wire, straightening wire, pointing, etc.), Babbage (1963) indicates the type of worker classified by age and sex (man, woman, girl and boy), rather than by type of skill, and his or her daily pay. This last varied according to the job to be performed (although the criteria are not specified), but also to the type of worker allocated to it, with decreasing compensation for female and younger workers.

In the Fordist system, not all socio-demographic differences are relevant to management. For instance, language, religion, and culture are neglected because they

hardly affect the production process, since they are not related to (bodily) skills and there is little need for communication between workers on the line. As Burrell (1997: 105) points out, Taylorism manages migrants 'by making their origins, beliefs and values meaningless and immaterial. It does not socialize the [immigrant] peasantry; it circumvents them'. Clearly, in such space, there are no conditions of possibility for a practice of diversity management to emerge. Socio-demographic differences lack legitimacy within the productive rationale, since they are either considered irrelevant or re-conducted to the division of labour. It is according to this latter that both work (labour in an abstract sense) and the human beings that perform it (labour in a literal sense) are divided (Braverman 1974: 79 based on Ruskin 1907).

The blurring boundaries of post-Fordism weaken the correspondence between professional and socio-demographic classifications. While specific groups remain concentrated in certain sectors and jobs, segregation in general tends to be less than perfect. Not only is the workforce increasingly demographically diverse, but also, diverse workers come more often in contact with each other. At the same time, in the new networked, customer-oriented organization, chances of encounters between members of different socio-demographic groups across the organizational boundaries increase. Especially in the service sector, such encounters represent key moments in the production process, as workers' economic value is produced through their social interaction with consumers during the service delivery.

Diversity management attempts to regulate workers' identity as members of specific socio-demographic groups in order to activate the productive potential of such identity. This productive potential can be of two types. First, it can derive from the activation of alliances between organizational members and individuals outside the organization with a common socio-demographic profile. This is typically the case

of customers preferring to deal with first-line workers who have the same sex, language, cultural background or age, etc. Examples of this rationale are the recruitment of migrant and/or female personnel in public services such as hospitals and police stations. Conversely, alliances across organizational borders can be used to recruit individuals belonging to specific groups that cannot be easily contacted through usual communication channels. Second, productive potential can derive from the specific creativity that 'diverse' workers are expected to bring in as members of a specific socio-demographic group rather than as individuals. They are expected to make a valuable creative contribution not only as individuals, but also as representatives of a group with a specific social role and therefore a different life experience. Examples of this rationale are the testing of new product by diverse people, or regulations guaranteeing the participation of a certain amount of women in the political decision-making process.

These different types of economic potential, which diverse workers hold as 'representatives' of a specific socio-demographic group, are central to three arguments commonly used to make the 'business case' of diversity: the customer/marketing argument, the recruitment argument, and the creative argument (Cox & Blake, 1991). They are further also implied in the moral imperative, for organizations, to 'reflect the society in which they operate'.

Framing diverse workers as representatives of a socio-demographic group operates as a control mechanism in two main related ways. On one side, it defines these workers as less than full subjects, reducing them to simple manifestations of a larger group (Zanoni & Janssens, 2004). This is achieved, among others, through training activities that aim at developing knowledge about the values and behaviours of specific socio-demographic groups in the organization. Such training intends to

prevent misunderstanding, possible inter-group conflict and to enable workers to better work together and be more productive. This knowledge however creates a 'truth of diversity' and, by so doing, binds diverse workers to acceptable expressions of agency in the organizational context (Foucault, 1970; 1977). Such definition of diversity is clearly opposed to the regulation of individual subjectivity as illustrated in the previous section, generating ambiguity and tension within diversity literature revolving around the dichotomy individual-group (Liff, 1997).

On the other side, from a more 'modern' perspective, the stress diversity management puts on socio-demographic groups can be seen as a managerial strategy to actively fragment class identity by promoting multiple, less antagonistic group identities in the organization. Here, diversity management is a hegemonic discourse promoting a 'false consciousness' among workers whose position, within the capital-labour relation, is not at all post- but rather pre-Fordist (Harvey 1993).

### **Diversity management: Regulating organizational identity**

Diversity management regulates workers' identity in a third additional way by constructing them as members of the organization. In this sense, diversity management is closely linked to the management of organizational culture as both sets of practices construct individuals as part of a larger entity, the organization, with which they are supposed to share values and to which they are expected to be committed.

In the Fordist space, the relationship between the organization and its workers are constructed on more traditional terms. Workers have an interest in the organization only in so far the organization provides employment and represents therefore a source of livelihood. Trade unions attempt to protect these interests whenever they are

endangered. Organizational hierarchy and the clear boundaries between jobs and between the organization and the outside facilitate direct forms of control such as superiors' surveillance. This form of direct control is not questioned as hierarchy is the main structuring principle of Western social institutions (Alvesson, 1990). Authority legitimately originates in one's position in the hierarchy as in the family, the Church and State apparatuses such as school and the army.

The flexible structures and blurry boundaries that characterize the post-Fordist space tend to disrupt this clear relationship between one's position in the hierarchy and one's authority. In order to be able to function as an integrated, coordinated whole, the de-centred organization can no longer rely on superiors' surveillance; rather it requires employees to control themselves (and each other). This is achieved, not only by regulating workers' identity as individuals and members of socio-demographic groups, but also by making them adhere to certain norms, values, understandings, beliefs, and ideologies that define the organization's identity, its culture. Once a set of core organizational values are appropriated and internalized by workers, and become important parts of their identity, they operate diffusedly as a centralizing, disciplining force in spite of workers' independence and autonomy (Weick, 1987). This mode of control has been theorized by the literature on organizational culture that has been flourishing since the 1980s. The very idea of what an organization is shifted away from its materiality towards its expressive, ideational and symbolic aspects (Smircich, 1983) enacted through rituals, ceremonies, language, stories, jokes, and architecture. These latter stimulate workers' commitment, loyalty and enthusiasm (Martin, 1992) providing outlets for their need to belong.

Diversity management contributes to the creation of such shared organizational culture by making it explicitly compatible with workers' different individual and

socio-demographic identities. Diversity management can do so in two distinct ways. On the one hand, it can construct difference as an 'existential' condition of each employee ('we are all different') and doing so, create a counterbalancing sense of sameness. On the other, it can position socio-demographic differences on a different level, subsume them under a higher form of sameness, the organization's culture. In both cases, differences are no longer distinct, deeply rooted, pervasive and immutable, as in the case of socio-demographic group identities. Rather, they become folkloric, expendable, as synonyms of (individual or group) uniqueness subordinate to the shared organizational culture. As such, they can be not only tolerated but even celebrated without running the risk to compromise the latter.

Diversity management enhances organizational culture by stressing the need for inclusiveness and connection across socio-demographic differences, which can prevent costly conflictive interpersonal and inter-group relations (Cox & Blake, 1991). At the same time, those same features of an organization's culture can be used to profile the organization as employer of choice and attract more qualitative human resources, with positive effects for the organization's bottom line (Cox & Blake, 1991).

Particular events function as organizational rituals to construct diversity as a legitimate aspect of the organizational culture. For instance, dinners where the food belongs to the culinary tradition of a specific group of workers, parties celebrating different religious or cultural holidays or marriages, information sessions about a culture, social activities organized in collaboration with civil society associations, family parties, etc. These occasions celebrate differences and promote understanding among organizational individuals and groups. A probably even more important role is played by everyday organizational practices such as, for instance, the form and style

of communication, the organization and style of the physical work space and work times, as well as organizational dress codes. These practices, which represent the (informal) terms on which individuals function in the organization, are not only manifestations of the organizational culture, but also diversity management practices. In fact, they establish to which degree individual and group differences are accepted and respected in the organization. The more these practices promote inclusiveness and respect, the more they are compatible with workers' identity regulation at the individual and group level, further promoting their commitment and binding them to the organization

## **Conclusion**

Specific diversity management policies are developed by variously combining the regulation of individual, group and organizational identities to fit the specific productive space in which it operates. At the same time, workers might be stimulated to adopt one specific identity in function of specific productive practices. On the one hand, these multiple identities' complementarity can enhance the organizational and individual flexibility and adaptability. On the other, however, this multiplicity harbours contradiction, as these identities are not fully compatible with each other. In the next section, we illustrate how tensions can be actively exploited by workers to resist their subordination.

## **Resistance through Diversity: Re-appropriating Identities**

Constructing workers' as individuals, members of socio-demographic groups, and members of the organization, diversity management operates as a control mode in post-Fordist productive spaces. The control is double: while it promotes workers' identifications that are favourable for the organization, by so doing, it also obscures

other identifications that are noxious to it. Through foregrounding specific constructions of workers' subjectivity, it undermines their identification with the labour class (Harvey, 1993; Williams, 1994) and hampers the deployment of class identity as an organizing principle for collective resistance. Diversity management does not however preclude resistance *tout court* from the post-Fordist space. Since identity cannot just be imposed, it needs to be 'regulated', which implies that individuals and groups still play an active role in managing it. This active role however also gives them opportunities to resist, albeit in new, heterogeneous and diffuser ways.

Working subjects are not only agents of their own (ideological) subordination through adherence to specific identities but also agents of resistance against management and even of their own (micro-)emancipation (Knights & Willmott, 1989; Willmott 1993; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). For instance, organizational culture can fail to mobilize workers' emotional energies when the individual becomes sceptical and takes distance from his/her role (Willmott, 1993). Such form of resistance may however also be 'self-defeating' in as far as it leads to a 'vicious circle of cynicism and dependence' where workers exclude themselves from involvement in the (re)design of the institutions (Willmott, 1993). Other forms of resistance may be based on the selective use of different, conflicting discourses by organizational agents in the process of (re-)constituting their identity in a favourable way (McCabe, 2000). However, this form of resistance might be partial as those who oppose a certain discourse are just as necessary to its reproduction since 'resistance is both constituted by, and reproductive of, the discourse it seeks to resist' (McCabe 2000: 949). Finally, Alvesson and Willmott (2002) question the organization's monopoly of the regulation of workers' identity by pointing to the multiplicity of images and ideals present in the



broader societal context. This multiplicity exposes the subject to new possibilities of being which had previously been suppressed, contained, or 'othered' and which can lead to forms of micro-emancipation.

Keeping these reflections in mind, we briefly discuss how diversity management, by regulating workers' individual, group and organizational identities, provides them with specific opportunities to resist. In particular, we examine how workers appropriate those identities by exploiting the implicit tensions between them. While each organization attempts to enforce a specific mix of these three identities coherent with its productive space, workers can attempt to subvert it by individually or collectively stressing one identity at the expense of the others, both within and across the fragile organizational boundaries, to reach their own ends.

### **Re-appropriating individual identity**

The autonomous, self-managing subject promoted by diversity management and HRM is productive only in as far as the subject sees his/her individual interests coinciding with those of the organization. While diversity and HRM practices create and nourish an individualized entrepreneurial identity, they might also raise expectations that the organization is not able (or willing) to meet. If a worker perceives a gap between the promised meritocratic, non-discriminating system in which s/he can develop his/her individual potential and what actually occurs in the organization, s/he might attempt to gain more control over his/her work.

This can occur within the organization, by re-fusing to co-operate with other organizational actors or imposing oneself. Or, workers can re-gain control by exiting the organization and use their skills in other spaces such as competing organizations, the market, and even the social sphere or the family. As autonomous individuals, they

can change jobs, go free-lance, or even prioritize other types of non-work related activities. In sum, a strongly individualized identity can represent a resource for resistance –and perhaps even micro-emancipation– because it fosters individual disconnection and detachment, which can potentially be turned against the organization.

### **Re-appropriating group identity**

The interests of workers belonging to a specific socio-demographic group do not always coincide with organizational interests either. A strong collective identity of a group might also be used as a resource against the organization. For instance, if the diversity policy focuses on a socio-demographic group's competences, that group can become more aware of the organizational value of those competences and use them to force more favourable work conditions. Moreover, if the group is concentrated in a specific segment of the production process, its socio-demographic identity might stimulate solidarity and possibly form the basis for developing a professional identity. Also, a socio-demographic identity can be used against other groups of workers or management, creating costly conflicts.

If the diversity policy defines diverse workers in too a deterministic manner, solely on the basis of their shared socio-demographic profile and related competences, the group as a whole or single individuals belonging to the group might react negatively as they are denied full subjectivity (cf. Zanoni & Janssens, 2004). This again might create discontent and conflict. The group might perceive itself differently from how the organization defines the group, or an individual might perceive his/her own interests as different from those of the socio-demographic group and precisely seek in the organization a way to distance him/herself from it.

Further, a strong socio-demographic identity might stimulate workers' stronger loyalty to members of the same group outside the organization rather than to the organization itself. For instance, if workers perceive themselves as sharing an identity with clients belonging to the same socio-demographic group, whom they are expected to serve, they might take these clients' side against organizational interests. In sum, a socio-demographic group identity can represent a resource for resistance –and perhaps even micro-emancipation– because it fosters connection and loyalty to a socio-demographic group, which can occasionally be incompatible with organizational interests.

### **Re-appropriating organizational identity**

A strong organizational identity can also occasionally be used against the organization or, more often, in favour of the individual worker or group of workers. If workers' perceive a gap between the ideal and the real organizational culture, they might use the ideal to force the acknowledgement of their rights as individuals or as a group. This claim might go well beyond what the organization had originally intended to tolerate and start a process of organizational change. Conversely, diverse workers might use the values of a diversity-friendly organizational culture to defend it whenever the organization introduces changes in order to become more profitable.

At the same time, workers' strong identification with the organization, enhancing organizational results in good times, might have particularly negative effects in bad ones. Events such as restructuring and business process reengineering, causing layoffs and work reorganization, might in fact adversely affect the morale and commitment of workers who identify with the organization more than they affect the morale and commitment of those who do not identify with it. Also, strong

organizational cultures that develop on a particular site, can, in conflict situations, facilitate an *ad hoc* alliance between management and workers of that site against the mother-company, in a way that is against the mother-company's interests.

Individuals and groups might use their organizational identity as a resource to resist not only against the organization, but also against other actors. For instance, they might do so to establish favourable power relationship with suppliers and customers, in other professional contexts, and even to affirm themselves within their family or one of the socio-demographic groups they belong to. As members of an organization, they can in fact claim part of its authority and reputation (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969).

In sum, a strong organizational identity can represent a resource for resistance – and perhaps even micro-emancipation– whenever workers appropriate that identity to claim their rights within the organization, react to the organization's (or the mother-company's) attempts to sever the organic bond that it had previously established through diversity management and organizational culture, or use their organizational identity to establish favourable power relationships with third actors.

## **Diversity Management in the Post-Fordist Productive Space**

In this chapter we intended to develop an alternative genealogy of diversity management that relates its emergence to the shifts that have been occurring in the last decades in the productive space and that are generally labelled post-Fordism. In order to do so, we have illustrated how material and discursive practices at the economic, organizational and work levels have changed, re-configuring the productive space, and creating the conditions for new modes of capital's control onto labour to emerge.

We have argued that diversity management represents one of such new, indirect modes of control, next to HRM and the management of organization culture. As these latter, diversity management operates by regulating workers' identities, that is, by promoting workers' self-constructions that are conducive to the attainment of organizational goals. We have illustrated three types of workers' identities which are typically regulated through diversity management: individual identity, socio-demographic group identity, and organizational identity.

Workers' identities as individuals, members of a socio-demographic group, and members of the organization hamper the development of a shared class identity and collective resistance based on it. However, they do not prevent resistance *tout court*. Precisely because diversity management operates through the self, it also offers possibilities for workers' resistance and even micro-emancipation both at the individual level and at the collective levels of the socio-demographic group or the organization as a whole. In fact, the (control) practices of the post-Fordist space do not solve the contradictions inherent to the capitalist relations of production (cf. Rainnie & Kraithman, 1992), as it is sometimes alleged (cf. Gough, 1992). By understanding diversity management as a control mode through identity regulation characterizing the post-Fordist productive space, rather than as a demographic or legal phenomenon, we can enhance our understanding not only of how control is exerted in such space, but also of how workers' develop alternative forms of resistance to it and, possibly, emancipate themselves.

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